



REMBRANDT

GEMS OF ART



Painted 1640

In the National Gallery

PORTRAIT OF HIMSELF

REMBRANDT

1607 - 1669

By

J. B. MANSON

1923

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PREFACE

IN this little book an effort has been made to produce a blend of biography and art which might happily achieve that unknown quantity of being popular. Even when, as the case is with Rembrandt, the experiences of life dove-tailed in so admirably with the development of artistic genius, this is no easy matter; for one palate the mixture may be a little too bitter, another may find it a shade too sweet. But that the book may lead others, who have not yet had that incomparable pleasure, to a direct study of the works of the master, is the hope of the author.

Neither is it easy, when so many books on Rembrandt have been read or consulted, to signalize any particular work as having been of special use. Every student of Rembrandt is indebted to the researches of Bode and De Groot, of Michel and of Scheltema, to mention but a few. Professor Baldwin Brown's book encloses a mine of information in a compact form, while M. Auguste Bréal has written a charmingly human narrative. I am particularly indebted to Sir Charles Holmes's brilliant and lucid "Notes on the Art of Rembrandt," not so much for information as for stimulus, and to Professor A. M. Hind's study of Rembrandt's etchings.

J. B. M.

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Painted c. 1635

In the National Gallery

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REMBRANDT VAN RYN

Chapter I : INTRODUCTORY

ALL great art is essentially simple. This is true of every work that has stood the test of time. It is particularly true of Rembrandt's work. The reason is that the true artist is concerned only with the expression of his inward vision in the most direct and most appropriate manner. He must discard everything that is not essential to the complete realization of the emotional impulse which he has to express in a tangible and concrete form.

Very few artists have attained to this perfection; Rembrandt reached it absolutely in his last phase. One may say that the absence of simplicity is a proof in itself that the artist has not yet found the proper form of expression of his emotion.

There is something radically wrong with the productions of many modern painters which cannot be understood without a good deal of explanation, and which, after a certain lapse of time, cease to convey anything even to their producers. It is not profundity but poverty of thought that such painters seek to hide beneath a complicated method of expression or publish with a boast of incomprehensibility.

So many of the younger modern artists offer us ingenuity in the place of art; artifice in place of thought; perplexity in place of lucidity. The full mind takes the most direct way to rid itself of its content in a concrete form.

Rembrandt's greatness lies originally in his power of feeling things more deeply and more intensely than other people. It was not in the brilliant and original methods of his expression; those, fascinating as they are, were but means to an end. The virtue of any work of art is not to be found merely in its technical excellence, as is too commonly supposed; that is only the outward expression of the inward emotion, the artist's intuition, and is inseparable from it. It will be observed how Rembrandt's technical methods developed and became more original and more interesting as his vision became maturer and more intense. The extent of the spiritual expression of his latest years could not have been realized by the methods of his earlier periods.

The happiness of it, the superb quality of Rembrandt's perfected achievement, was due to the fortunate combination of his two wonderful gifts: unusual depth of feeling and a unique power of expressing it.

The unity of conception and expression, to which he attained more perfectly than any other artist, did not come without effort. His days were laborious; his inquiry and exploration were incessant. With all his natural genius, he could not reach his consummation without endless endeavour.

Of all the qualities of a painter, cleverness is the least admirable and the most admired. The self-conscious or cultivated cleverness, evidence of which is to be seen on the walls of all modern exhibitions of pictures, becomes an end in itself instead of being directed—the legitimate business of painting—to the realization of a received impression. In the work of most painters who practise it, one need seek for nothing further, for

invariably there is nothing. In Rembrandt's work, although it is inevitable that one should delight in the cleverness of his drawings, cleverness is the quality which is least obvious. One detaches it, later, from the complete expression, but one is first impressed, carried away, overwhelmed by the immensity and profundity of his vision and his insight into Nature, and especially human nature.

Rembrandt was the most human of all great painters. His life is inseparable from his art; he lived to paint, and he worked harder and more joyously than most painters; his life was made up of simple pleasures and instinct with warm-hearted sympathy. He was of humanity and genius all compact. He had great qualities, and the faults of them and all the frailties of human nature.

I suppose that more nonsense has been talked and written about art than about anything else. Yet the matter is exceedingly simple; so simple as to be almost incapable of explanation. Art is merely the visible or tangible expression of intuition; it is the expression of an impression. It is the realization, in a concrete form, of the vision and feeling of an artist. The kind of subject has nothing to do with it, although the majority of people like pictures for their subject matter. The subject is simply the thing that has aroused the emotion of the artist, and without that emotion (feeling, inspiration, or intuition, whatever one may call it) there is no art. That is why pictures, which are admirable representations of nature in a photographic way, but in which the painter has expressed no emotion simply because he felt none, leave us cold after the first admiration of their skill. They take the eye and gain the price, and then disappear

A MAN WITH A CAP

Painted c. 1650

In the National Gallery



for ever, or remain—alas, too often !—as dead monuments to mediocrity on the walls of art galleries.

Nor is art invention, for it is neither scientific nor intellectual, notwithstanding the doctrines of certain modern propagandists. It is, above all, individual. It is fundamentally unchanged through the ages. New aspects of life may predominate and new ways of looking at things and, with them, new methods of expression; but human emotion, the quintessence of art, remains the same.

Rembrandt may or may not be the most fitting subject of hero-worship, but his life was never remote; his experiences were common to humanity, and his works—his painted visions—are peculiarly appropriate as an example of what art is. It is perhaps impossible to separate his life from his art; perhaps it never is possible; his art and life developed together. We see his youthful genius, his awakening powers; we see the influence of success : how, for a time, it kept him at a certain level, and finally we see the effect of sorrow and worldly failure, and how it liberated his spirit so that it soared, in his art, to heights that had not been previously attained.

In the first half of his life one is aware of his pre-occupation with his material when his expression remained incomplete, and in his last years the fusion of the material with the spiritual, and the consequent complete freedom and perfection of expression. At every moment of his life, one may say, he was practising his art. Even when he was not actually painting or drawing or etching he was among his people, watching them, studying them, knowing them.

All his pictures are portraits of human beings, of simple

separate persons, even when he painted the most far-fetched subjects or disguised his sitters in the Oriental flummery which he liked too well. Saul or Abraham or Jacob, whatever he called him, was really the old Jew round the corner, whom he knew to the depth of his being, and whose life in its pathos, simplicity, and complexity he revealed in so masterly a manner on his canvases; because it was always human emotion he sought to express.

If there is drama in his paintings, it is always the drama inherent in the human soul—not an applied drama, a drama only in name; but mostly his works are sympathetic revelations of the unconscious pathos of human life.

There is an inferior kind of painter (common to all ages) who disguises the emptiness of his own mind behind the pretentiousness of his subject matter, and conceals the fact that the real life of every day has nothing to say to him, behind a bombast of *prétention*, classical or historical pretension. Rembrandt, like all the greatest painters, found his subjects in, and drew his inspiration from, the life which surrounded him and which he knew intimately. Even when dignified with titles taken from the Bible, his pictures were in essence paintings of everyday life in some aspect or other in the picturesque, if dirty, quarter of Amsterdam, where he spent the greater part of his life; lived and loved, suffered and died.

And this is natural, if not inevitable, for greatness of art lies in the depth of the artist's feeling, and what he knows best he will feel most deeply. It does not lie in any trick of the brush or facility with the pencil, or in any ingenious system of *chiaroscuro*.

The feeling expressed with varying intensity in all his work, reaching a height of poignancy in the drawing of "Abraham Sacrificing Isaac," a keenness of dramatic intensity in the drawing of "The Supper at Emmaus," and a depth of sadness in the painting of "David Playing Before Saul," was the expression of his own feeling and suffering; the record of his own spiritual experience.

Rembrandt was essentially a rebel; that is to say, he was an independent spirit who refused to follow the example of his prosaic and conventional countrymen. His work was infused with his own powerful personality, and therefore stood out in striking contrast with the prevailing practice of painting of the time, which was, for the most part, an Italianized convention, and was neither national nor spontaneous, nor racy of the soil.

The process of steady self-development, as followed by Rembrandt and all considerable artists, is a slow one, and his best work was produced after he was forty-five years old.

Decorative painting, which had been brought to a superb state of perfection during the Italian Renaissance owing to the needs of the great Italian palaces and the patronage of the Italian princes, had fallen from its height chiefly owing to the lack of demand. Where it existed in a very modified form, and expressed itself, though in a degraded manner, in the large "Corporation" pictures so popular in the Dutch seventeenth century, it was strictly limited to the demands, and usually the bad taste, of its patrons. It was not a form of expression in which Rembrandt was ever at his best, notwithstanding the feeling of dramatic intensity he achieved in his great painting of "The Night Watch."

In any case, the grand style is not the most fitting or most natural form of expression for an artist ; it imposes too many limitations and conditions, whereas the only limitations that should bind an artist are those imposed by his actual material and his own personality. It set the artist an exterior problem, when the only problem should have been that of expressing his own emotion.

Rembrandt, throughout his life, was concerned entirely with the expression of his own feeling and vision. In that lay his strength, and from the strength of his personality, as much as from its weakness, came his final ruin in the worldly sense.

He was the first of the moderns, and there is a very real kinship between his work and modern art ; particularly close is his relationship to the French Romantic movement of the early nineteenth century, and especially to Delacroix. His work even now is modern in essence, presumably because the truths he expressed were eternal, and this despite the limited conventionality of his colour. He achieved his results by tone and modelling ; colour with him was an added beauty, but it was restrained and artificial, and not the colour nor in the key of Nature. His use of colour was mainly decorative ; he did not feel Nature through colour, as the modern Impressionists did. It was not an essential part of his expression.

The contemplation of the panorama of Rembrandt's life is very moving. The eager young student, gifted with genius, working at his art incessantly ; his early success and prosperity ; his happy marriage and his wife's premature death ; his increasing fame ; his generosity and extravagance ; his life with his beloved Hendrickje ; his great work, "The Night Watch,"

which helped to lead to his ruin through the displeasure its originality gave to his patrons; his bankruptcy and ruin; the death of Hendrickje and of his son Titus; and the final period of his loneliness and homelessness, during which he produced some of his greatest works—the greatest works in the world—make a story of intensely human interest and pathos.

It is not the purpose of this book to present a critical examination of Rembrandt's work, to analyse, to number and to stow away, as so many dry documents, his vital living expressions of human thought and passion. It does not attempt to deal exhaustively, or even otherwise, with every phase of his enormous production. That, indeed, would be impossible within so small a compass, seeing that there are about five hundred of his paintings known, nearly three hundred etchings, and about a thousand drawings. It does not propose to tear to pieces the rose, petal by petal, in order to discover the secret of its beauty; nor does it seek to estimate his place in art nor his influence, so extensive and so subtle, on the work of other painters. All these things have been done, and admirably done, by many writers and experts, whose books are easily accessible to those who would pursue the matter further.

It seeks simply to tell the story of his life in all its human richness and pathos, and to show, in doing so, how his pictures came to be painted; how they grew out of the circumstances of his existence and the impelling quickness of his feelings; in the hope that it may induce others to learn to look at his pictures, his etchings, and his drawings, as expressions of human feeling, essentially real and companionable, and not as things remote and and curious or beyond the comprehension of ordinary individuals.

The majority of the illustrations are taken from pictures in the superb collection in the National Gallery, where they are easily available for direct study. They represent, however inadequately, the development of his painting from the year 1634 to his great picture of "The Syndics of the Cloth Merchants' Guild" of 1661-2—his crowning achievement.

CHAPTER II

LEYDEN : YOUTH AND DEVELOPMENT

HE was a citizen of Leyden—of that Leyden with its windmills and towers set on the banks of the old Rhine, in a flat country of vast distances stretching far away to the sea, intersected with canals, with its ever-changing atmospheric effects—a country in which he wandered when tired of the city, and which he has made familiar to us in many etchings and drawings—of that Leyden recovering from the brutal effects of long war and the siege by the Spaniards in 1574, and becoming second in importance only to Amsterdam, and just beginning to regain its ancient status as the intellectual centre of the Dutch country.

Leyden, with its University and its distinguished professors—Scaliger, Lipsius, Arminius, Heinsius, and how many others—attracted to its hospitable doors students of all kinds and from many countries. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the menace of Spain had been broken, and the patriotic enthusiasm awakened by the long struggle began to have its effects on Dutch art as on other branches of peaceful industry.

In the midst of this reawakening activity Rembrandt Harmensz van Ryn was born on July 15, 1606, in a house close by the old White Gate. Although there is no official record, the date is accepted on the authority of Orlers, a contemporary who had been burgomaster of Leyden. His father, Harmen Gerritsz, born at Leyden in 1565, was a miller; a careful man of some local importance; a fairly well-off man, who owned houses and

THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY

Painted 1644

In the National Gallery



a mill and property of some sort outside the town walls. He was a man of foresight, and had reserved for himself a grave in the Church of St. Peter, in Leyden. He had married Cornelia, the daughter of a baker, Willem van Zuytbrouck. They had nine children, of whom Rembrandt was the eighth.

There are some etchings, mostly dated 1630, the year of his father's death, which are supposed to be portraits of his father, mainly, apparently, on the authority of a portrait by Gerard Dou of the same subject, and the small portrait in The Hague of an anxious-looking man, painted about 1629, and generally supposed to represent Rembrandt's father. Whether it was really his father who sat for these portraits has been doubted, as the same man appears in later etchings, and also in works by Lievens and Van der Vliet. On the other hand, nothing would be more natural than for Rembrandt to draw his father at this period, as he drew and etched the portraits of other members of his family.

His appearance is characteristic : curiously long-headed, bald, with a hooked nose, sharp ferrety eyes, large ears, and a scrubby beard; a cautious, anxious man, devoted to business and the acquisition of riches. He appears in the portraits, sometimes bare-headed, sometimes adorned with a fur cap or a more fantastic head-dress, according to the son's fancy, and once in the same steel gorget in which the young artist painted himself in the charming portrait at The Hague Gallery.

The mother's appearance is even more familiar. Rembrandt's first known etching, a portrait of her, is dated 1628—the same year as the little panel at The Hague, which is an admirable piece of characterization, an expression of shrewdness, modified

by a sort of indulgent humour. He evidently held her in great respect and affection. He painted and etched her always in ordinary dress, never decorating her with the fanciful semi-Oriental costumes which he made others of his family wear. It is clear that she was a person of great character, pious, shrewd, simple, and good-humoured, while capable of firmness and severity when necessary.

Rembrandt inherited his extraordinary capacity for work from both his parents; and probably as a child he received his first lessons from his mother and his familiarity with the Bible from her early teaching. The faces of his eldest brother, Adriaen—a miller, like the father—who appears in some of the later pictures, and his only sister, Lysbeth, are also known to us.

Rembrandt's parents appear at first to have decided that their son should be a scholar. Whether there was any particular reason why they should have chosen such a career for him cannot be known. He was not, at any time, fond of learning or even reading. An inventory made in 1656 showed that he possessed only fifteen books, besides an old Bible; the latter he certainly knew pretty thoroughly. As a boy, he must have been bright and intelligent, and his parents, being ambitious, probably wished him to follow a career superior to their own trade, and the University would seem furthest removed from it.

At any rate, he was sent, when quite young, to the Latin School with the idea of entering the University afterwards. His name was entered on the University books on May 20, 1620, when he was only fourteen years old. He does not seem to have greatly benefited by his studies, although he got a fair education; his heart and mind were in other things.

It is not difficult to imagine that the young student, with his keen interest in life and that passion for liberty which characterized him at all times, preferred to watch the life in the streets to attending dull classes. The life that surrounded him was essentially picturesque. Beggars of every description—cripples and men broken in war, in strange costumes and head-dresses—thronged the streets. Tradesmen, women haggling in the markets, the children, and the armed guard, all made up an ever-changing pageant of inexhaustible interest to the young artist, who was more than usually receptive. Duty in the class-rooms became extremely irksome.

His parents, unlike so many parents, do not seem to have desired to thwart his ambition on realizing that it lay in the direction of art. They withdrew him from school and allowed him to follow the desires of his own heart. Art, in any case, was then held in high repute. Consideration of the riches and reputation won by Lucas van Leyden, whose paintings adorned the Town Hall, may have decided his parents to sacrifice their own inclinations and caused them to regard with favour the career of a painter for their son. In any case, they withdrew him from the school, and in 1620 placed him in the studio of Jacob van Swanenburch, who, so far as we know, was a thoroughly commonplace painter. He, following what was the custom of the time (and, to some extent, still is), had lived and studied art in Italy to his own detriment. He had, however, good qualities as a man. He was kind and just, and did not make money out of his students. His influence on his pupil was probably negligible, although Rembrandt made rapid progress under his tuition. In a short time he had surpassed his master,

as the latter was the first to recognize. Rembrandt remained with him for three years, that being the usual period of apprenticeship. Leaving him, he went to Amsterdam in search of a more advanced master whose instruction could carry him a little farther along the road.

There were not many masters to choose from at the time, even in Amsterdam. There was a group of minor painters who had acquired the academic manners of Italy. In landscape there were Van Goyen and Hercules Seghers, both of whom were thoroughly unpopular. In portraiture—which was a branch of art peculiarly popular with the Dutch, and which they practised on sound, if rather dull, lines—there were Ravestijn and Mierevelt, and Frans Hals, an outstanding and exceptional figure, was almost at the height of his fame.

Rembrandt finally selected Pieter Lastman (1583–1633), a thoroughly Italianized Dutchman typical of his time. His artistic parents were Caravaggio and Elsheimer. He was a much more important figure than Swanenburch, and although a mediocre painter he was prominent among the artists in Amsterdam. In Rome he had acquired a knowledge of the academic rules of composition. He painted conventional pictures in crude colours, but it is interesting to note that in his work there was no trace of the dramatic use of *chiaroscuro*, so characteristic of Rembrandt's work. He was a man of dull mind and artificial taste.

Rembrandt entered Lastman's studio, but it was not very long before he found that he had very little in common with his master. There was no sympathy between them, and

Rembrandt, with his passion for real life, no doubt found his pictures, which were laboured and cold, intolerable. Routine—and especially school routine—was detestable to him, and he found his position as an apprentice living, more or less, in the house of a master—a master with whom he was dissatisfied—more of a hindrance than an aid to his development.

It appears that he had no definite agreement with Lastman, or else Lastman was as pleased to see the last of him as Rembrandt was to be free again, for after six months he had left Amsterdam and was back in Leyden.

It is doubtful if he got any particular good from Lastman, apart from experience; and experience of any sort is essential to an artist. He had not, anyhow, wasted much time. He acquired some of Lastman's characteristics: a fondness for detailed compositions, a tightness of handling, which it took years to get rid of, and something of the Italianized convention. From Lastman, too, he acquired a liking for Oriental finery and trivialities and other supposedly picturesque accessories. This latter taste may have been partly natural to him, as he never entirely outgrew it.

He put this new fondness into operation immediately on his return to Leyden, and his early pictures show how he loved to dress up his sitters in costumes which were quite foreign to their natures and played no part in their lives. All his family, with the notable exception of his mother, had to submit to be dressed up for their portraits. These features, however, were never an essential part of his pictures; they were mere and useless accessories, but they could not obscure his depth of feeling—his passion for, and intense interest in, life.

One thing he learnt during his stay in Amsterdam : that schools of art are useless to an artist of genius ; at the best, they are a convenience—a place where a student can find a model ; at the worst, a place where a student of mediocre talent can absorb the method of a master as blotting-paper mops up ink. Henceforth he determined, as Orlers has recorded, to study art by and for himself and in his own way.

Now followed a period of incessant and absorbing study. Arnold Houbraken, who was a sort of Dutch Vasari, says he worked without ceasing in his father's house as long as daylight lasted. When he was not indoors painting portraits and little pictures of subjects taken from the Bible he was out in the streets sketching the beggars, the markets, carts, wagons, animals—anything that took his fancy—or else he was wandering in the landscape outside the city walls drawing the river banks, trees and sheds and passing boats.

Everywhere he was seeking for character and individuality. His immense capacity for work lasted throughout his life, from his student days, through the bright years of his prosperity and the days of his ruin, up to the day of his death. Of no other painter can it be so truly said that his art was his life.

Besides portraits, mostly of his family, his paintings at this period were mainly of sacred subjects, such as it was customary for all young artists to try their hands at. He had for companion and fellow-student a youth about his own age, Jan Lievens (born in 1607), a gifted painter, with a rather facile talent and leanings towards the grand style. Lievens, who was the son of an embroiderer, was born in Leyden, and had been a fellow-student of Rembrandt's in Pieter Lastman's studio

(1617-19). They continued to work together at Leyden, and often painted the same subject. A certain old man with a white beard occurs in pictures painted by both the young artists. He is to be seen in pictures that Rembrandt painted at this period, such as "Lot and his Daughters" and "The Baptism of the Eunuch," at the Louvre.

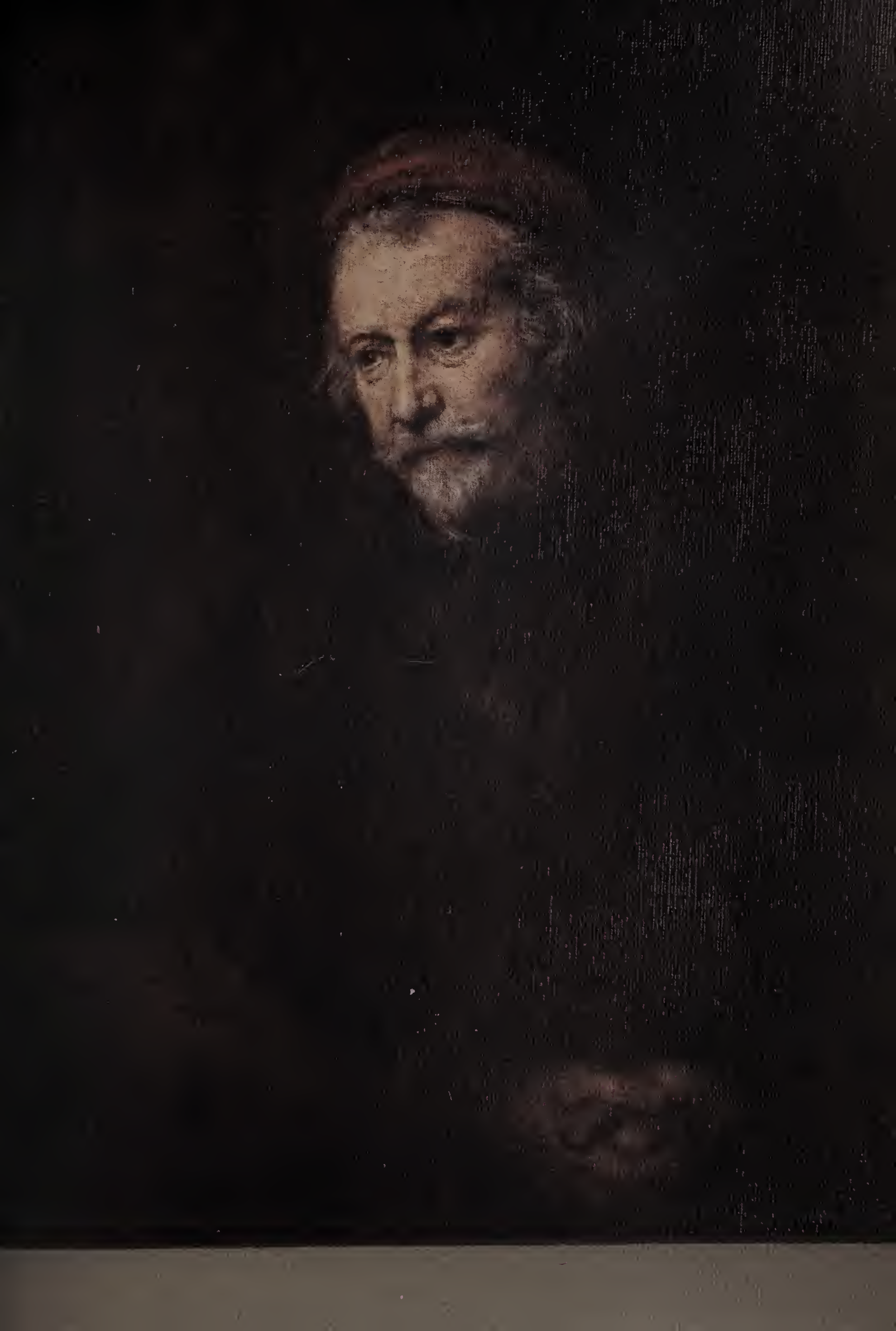
At this time Rembrandt was naturally proceeding along more or less conventional lines, both in the choice of subject and the method of painting, although his work from the beginning had an unmistakably individual quality. But all the time he was struggling for expression, and gradually he began to forget the pictures he had seen and the methods he had grown up among, and to go direct to Nature for subjects and to find in them the method of expression. This growing freedom of mind; this constant communion with Nature, led to the complete development of his genius and to that quality of originality in his work which was really the expression of sincere and spontaneous impressions received direct from Nature. It was in the constancy and quality of his work in these precious impressionable years, never to be recaptured, that the foundations of his future greatness were laid.

Some notes, first given to the world by Dr. J. A. Worp in 1891, written between the years 1629 and 1631 by the Dutch statesman and poet, Constantine Huygens (1596-1687)—who was especially interested in art, which, as he tells us, his father wanted him to learn—give us some interesting information about this "noble pair of youths of Leyden." He foretells their future greatness and expresses his astonishment that youths of such humble origin, one the son of a miller, the other of an

PORTRAIT OF AN OLD MAN

Painted 1659

In the National Gallery



embroiderer, should possess such remarkable gifts, especially as their teachers were so insignificant.

“Rembrandt,” he writes, “surpasses Lievens in taste and in quick sensibility, but is inferior to him in sublimity of invention and a certain audacity in ideas and forms.” “Lievens rather exaggerates the grandeur of the forms he has before his eyes than merely equals it, while the other (Rembrandt), wrapping himself in his work, prefers to concentrate on a small picture and gives in little an effect that on the vast canvases of others you look for in vain. . . In historical paintings, though Lievens is a consummate master, he will not easily equal the lively invention of his friend.” He goes on to complain that these “noble youths are so calmly satisfied that they hold Italy in small account, though they could visit it in a few months.” And this, he thinks, “is like a vein of madness in tempers so noble.” He dreams of the superb works they would create if only they were familiar with Raphael and Michael Angelo.

Rembrandt's reluctance to visit Italy was sound and instinctive. His realization of the danger of spending valuable youthful years in the study of Old Masters saved him, no doubt, from the fate which befell so many of the Dutch painters who followed the established custom of giving the finishing touches to their artistic education in Italy. They succumbed to forces too strong for them and became denationalized; their art developed into a hybrid production of classicism grafted on to a native homely realism. Fortunately; Rembrandt took an intensely personal view of his art. The need he felt for discovering a method entirely his own was his salvation. It led eventually to the establishment of Dutch national art on a

secure foundation. In this way he developed to the full extent of his powers.

It was about this time that he began to make a frequent practice of etching, an art which he brought to a state of perfection, which may have been equalled, but has not been surpassed. In this he owed little to his predecessors, who had done nothing to explore its possibility or develop the real character of etching. It was still limited to the traditions of line engraving. His earliest known etching is dated 1628. It is the small plate of his mother. The first portraits of himself also belong to this year.

He had the love of things which is characteristic of most painters. His early works show that he had already started the collection of those "accessories"; rich materials, arms, armour, and jewellery, which later became a passion and the indulgence of which helped to contribute to his final ruin. Like the majority of artists, he started by painting "still life," which is probably the obvious and best training. He kept up this practice through his life. As late as 1650 he etched "The Shell" with scrupulous care and minute detail. A "Still Life" by Rembrandt or a "Vanitas," as it was called, was sold at Amsterdam for thirty-one florins on May 11, 1756.

And now he received his first pupil. Gerard Dou, a painter, who became as famous as himself, went to him for instruction in 1628, at the age of fifteen. He remained with Rembrandt for three years, but whatever influence the latter had on his work was swamped in later years by the minute and trivial details which make Dou's work so popular, and in which all sense of reality and vividness of impression is lost.

During the next three years he had J. J. van der Vliet, the etcher, to assist him in his printing-room, fitted up with its presses, its bottles of acid, and stores of old paper. His output of etchings now became pretty considerable. He had a sure eye for the picturesque; there were subjects for his pencil, his brush, or his needle at any street corner; like all true painters, he found inspiration, as it is called, in the life that surrounded him. As Carlyle has said, "The poet can never have far to seek for a subject : the elements of his art are in him and around him on every hand; for him the Ideal world is not remote from the Actual, but under it and within it; nay, he is a poet, precisely because he can discern it there." And so it emphatically was with Rembrandt.

In 1630 he produced about thirty etchings, among which were the small plate of "The Presentation in the Temple," the small "Christ disputing with the Doctors," four portraits of his father, and eight or nine of himself.

His earlier etchings may show a certain timidity in style, but the command of material revealed in that early etching of his mother in 1628 is remarkable. Its subtlety of modelling and delicacy of expression suggest that it could not have been his first essay in the medium. He had learnt to etch some time previously, when he was a pupil of Lastman, and he must have etched plates which were either lost or destroyed.

Rembrandt's fame had now extended far beyond his native town. Commissions for portraits and other pictures began to reach him from Amsterdam, and his journeys to the great city for the purpose of executing portraits became more and more frequent. It was gradually becoming the fashion to be painted

by the great Rembrandt, and the calls upon his time necessitated his leaving Leyden to reside in Amsterdam.

At some time during this period he must have made the acquaintance of Jacob Pinas, another of the Italianized painters. Arnold Houbraken (1660–1719) says that Rembrandt worked for some time under Pinas, whom some considered to have been his first master. At the time of his bankruptcy he possessed three pictures by Pinas, who undoubtedly had a great influence on him. Pinas had a fondness for brown *chiaroscuro*; for those dramatic effects of light and shade which were characteristic of Rembrandt's earlier work. Pinas certainly had used this effect before Rembrandt was painting, and people began to say, according to Houbraken, that Rembrandt imitated Pinas in this respect. In any case, it is a matter of little importance. Much has been said of Rembrandt's use of extraordinary effects of light and shade. It was merely a convention, his own, by means of which he was able to work up to the most delicate, the most subtle shades of modelling.

Rembrandt's remarkable use of *chiaroscuro* has been spoken of as though it were the essence of his art. In itself it had no particular virtue; its value lay entirely in the use Rembrandt made of it as a means of expression. He certainly used it with wonderful effect, although he cannot be said to be the inventor of it. Velasquez and Leonardo were great masters of it. It dominated all painting until the French Impressionists introduced the use of a *chiaroscuro* of colour, about 1870, which has revolutionized the whole of modern art.

Rembrandt's first, or Leyden period as it is called, lasted until 1631. After he left Lastman he had worked strenuously,

painting from morning till night, in his own fashion. He was limited in the matter of models, although he pressed his family and friends into his service, and it was not until he settled in Amsterdam that he was able to study the nude. It took him many years to get rid of the tight handling and the smoothly finished surfaces which he had acquired at Lastman's studio, and which were typical of most Dutch art. But his studies had been directed towards the expression of character and individuality, and away from the conventional grace so much in favour with the Italianized Dutchmen. There is no evidence extant of his progress in painting previous to the year 1627, to which his first dated pictures, "The Banker" in Berlin and "St. Paul in Prison" at Stuttgart, belong.

He had, as we have noted, the capacity of finding his subjects in the life that surrounded him, which is characteristic of painters who are not academic. In this he was essentially modern. Art being the expression of an impression, it is natural that an artist should paint what he has seen and felt. Any composition conceived solely by the intellect or invented away from Nature itself, inevitably tends to become cold and formal, and leads to the danger of expressing types instead of individuals.

This was a danger which certainly never threatened Rembrandt. He studied everything and everywhere. The streets of Leyden were his happy hunting-ground. They swarmed with picturesque life of every description. Sketch-book in hand, he would spend whole days drawing the beggars and the passers-by, or else he would take them into his studio and make elaborate etchings of them. A series of such etchings, with a growing

freedom of line and a stricter observation of character, belongs to the year 1630. There is nothing of romantic exaggeration in those etchings, but wonderful observation, sympathy, and insight. He frequently used himself as a model, and during the years 1630 and 1631 he produced about twenty self-portraits.

He was also pre-occupied with sacred subjects at this period, such as "Judas bringing back the Price of his Betrayal," "The Presentation in the Temple," "Jesus among the Doctors," "Saint Anastasius," and many others. These works brought him celebrity as well as money. Commissions for portraits began to arrive from Amsterdam in increasing numbers, and he made up his mind—or, rather, it became necessary for him—to remove there altogether. He had already had connexions with the town. One of his friends was a picture dealer there, a man named Hendrick van Uylenburch, to whom he had already lent a sum of 1000 florins, which shows that he had already tasted of the fruits of prosperity. It was to Hendrick's house that he went when he transferred his quarters to Amsterdam.

CHAPTER III

AMSTERDAM : SUCCESS

BY the end of 1631, Rembrandt had moved to Amsterdam. At first, he lived in the house of his friend Hendrick van Uylenburch. After some months he left and established his quarters in a warehouse by the Bloemgracht, in the west of the town.

In Amsterdam, of course, with its multitudinous and varied life, he found many and greater things to interest. There were strange types, too, from all parts of the world. Here he was brought into closer contact with his fellow-artists and had greater facilities for work.

For the first time, he was able to study the nude model systematically, his paintings of which have been so severely criticized. He has been accused of being coarse and debased—of degrading art. The criticism is ridiculous, showing a complete misconception of his art. The popular taste favoured the graceful conventions then in vogue, which were cold and lifeless because they represented types instead of individuals. That Rembrandt should have painted women as he saw them, with all their individual characteristics and peculiarities, was an offence against what they considered good taste. It was not within their power to see the depth of feeling he expressed in his work or the solidity and suppleness, the quality and texture of living flesh he realized. His work in this direction was generally condemned. There were, it is true, times when he went astray and showed a want of the fitness of things, and

even a lack of humour, as, for example, when he painted a realistic picture of a clumsy Dutch woman and called it "Diana Bathing."

For the first year he was kept continually occupied with the portrait commissions which had brought him to Amsterdam. His portraits at this time were still strictly normal lines; they followed the accepted tradition of straightforward sincerity on sound, simple lines. He showed, indeed, a greater intensity of observation and a closer insight into character than most of his fellow-painters. But he was at this period the head of an accepted school of sound painters rather than an innovator or rebel. He had, however, this advantage: he brought to portraiture a rich experience gained in painting historical and religious pictures which was uncommon. The value of this is rather well indicated in a letter written to me by Mr. J. S. Sargent, the celebrated portrait painter, in 1901, when referring to a student desiring to become a portrait painter.

"The object of the student," he writes, "should be to acquire sufficient command over his material to do whatever Nature presents to him. The conventionalities of portrait painting are only tolerable in one who is a good *painter*—if he is only a good *portrait-painter* he is nobody. Try to become a painter first, and then to apply your knowledge to a special branch; but do not begin by learning what is required for a special branch, or you will become a mannerist."

His work was a consistent advance in the right direction. He studied individual character with ever greater insight, acquiring greater freedom of handling and more daring methods of using pigment as his intuition became keener. Each new sitter

presented a new problem, which he solved in his own way, gaining knowledge and experience by everything he did; even, or perhaps especially, by his failures. He never attempted to invent a comfortable and acceptable formula, like the majority of successful portrait painters. He was not attracted or misled by the virtuosity which was so popular, and which Frans Hals cultivated with so much success.

In the early Amsterdam years his work was the best of its kind that was being done, but it was of a kind which, being familiar, was readily acceptable. He soon became the most popular exponent of Dutch art of his time. He was constantly employed. During the period from 1632 to 1634 he painted no fewer than fifty portraits.

His portrait of an old lady with a ruff, said to be Françoise van Wasserhoven (in the National Gallery), painted in 1634, is typical of his work at this time. It still preserves the smooth surface qualities which were required of the painter. Its modelling is loose and without the grip and subtlety of the later portraits. Indeed, a comparison of this portrait with any of the portraits painted after 1650 is most illuminating, and shows the enormous strides in development he had yet to make. It is a wonderful study of character, like everything he painted, and the reflected half-lights on the right are beautifully expressed; but it is concerned with lesser things, such as would preoccupy a mind smaller than Rembrandt's. There is a slight conflict in it between the momentary aspect and the essential soul of it. The heavy shadow by the right cheek or the white ruff is false, and an effective device unworthy of so great an artist.

Nevertheless, in freedom of handling and actually in understanding of character, this painting itself shows a definite advance on "The Anatomy Lesson," painted only two years earlier. This picture was his first attempt at a portrait group.

Every important town possessed a theatre of anatomy, in which surgeons and professors of medicine lectured and demonstrated to their students and other medical men. There was such a lecture-hall in Leyden, which had been engraved by Swanenburch in 1610. The theatre at Amsterdam was already adorned by several pictures of anatomy lessons.

In 1632, Dr. Tulp, a celebrated surgeon, who was the chief lecturer there, commissioned Rembrandt to paint a picture to be offered to the corporation of surgeons to commemorate his connexion with the school. There are a good many of such pictures in existence, as the one painted by Michiel Jansz Mierevelt in the hospital at Delft. This is somewhat marred, as was often the case, by the introduction of unpleasant and gruesome details.

Rembrandt's picture is too well known to need much description. It represents, as the chief figure, the surgeon, Nicholaés Pieterszoon Tulp, dissecting the forearm of a corpse in the presence of seven other doctors. It is a collection of portraits worked into a pictorial composition. Rembrandt has sought to present the scene in a natural way so that the figures shall not appear to be posed, and yet each figure shall be represented adequately as a complete portrait. In this he has not been entirely successful. It is interesting to note how he refused to be bound by any such limitation in his celebrated painting of "The Night Watch," painted ten years later,

The figure of Dr. Tulp is admirable in pose and character. His whole attitude is that of a teacher. It is so realistically painted that the hands appear to move when one has gazed at it for a short time. This painting represents his greatest advance strictly along familiar and accepted lines. Although it was striking and effective, it was not in opposition to the accepted art of the time. He had not yet found that originality which awakens distrust; consequently, it was immensely popular.

Among the early Amsterdam portraits was one painted in 1632, representing a pretty fair-haired girl. This was Saskia, the youngest daughter of Rombertus van Uylenburch, a prosperous lawyer from an old Frisian family, and a relative of Rembrandt's friend Hendrick, the art dealer. She was born in 1612 and became an orphan in 1624, when her father, a widower, died. She spent her time with various members of her family, and Rembrandt met her at the house of Jan Sylvius, the well-known preacher, whose portrait he etched in 1634, and who was married to one of her cousins. In 1632 she was betrothed to Rembrandt, and two years later they were married, on June 22.

Saskia became his favourite model. He painted and etched her continually. Her pleasant face, with its fair hair, bright eyes, short and rather thick nose and double chin, is very familiar in the drawings, etchings, and paintings of this early period. She was the model for the "Betrothed Jewess" of 1632 and the "Flora" of 1634. She played many different rôles: that of the bride in "Samson's Wedding Feast," at Dresden, and "Susannah at the Bath," in the Hague Gallery.

In 1633 she appeared in armour as the goddess Bellona.

A silver-point drawing at Berlin shows her wearing a broad-brimmed hat and carrying a flower in her hand. The drawing bears the inscription, "This is a portrait of my wife when she was 21 years old, three days after we were married, the 8th of June, 1633," a date which is in conflict with that given in the register of the marriage. But Rembrandt was probably as unreliable about dates as he was about keeping accounts. Or the inscription may have been added by another hand. The well-known picture in Dresden, in which he is painted in the dress of a cavalier sitting by a well-furnished table, wineglass in hand, with the youthful Saskia on his knee, was painted in 1634 or 1635. Whatever faults it may have as a picture—and some critics are of opinion that it shows a want of taste—it is certainly evidence of the happiness of his life at this time.

A great deal of Saskia's time must have been given up to posing for her husband, and at moments she must have felt that art claimed him as much as, or more than, she did; that he was sometimes more painter than man, more artist than lover. When he was at work he would scarcely stop to eat, and Houbraken has recorded that on such occasions he would be quite content with bread and cheese or a herring. Such habits must have been quite contrary to the training and instincts of a good Dutch housewife.

By his incessant labours he certainly reached an intensity of feeling and a perfection of self-expression attained by few, if any other, artists, but it must, to some extent, have been at the cost of his life as a man and a husband.

His success and popularity increased, and before very long he had become the fashion. Indeed, according to Houbraken,

“one could please the public only by imitating him.” Scores of painters tried to adopt his style; they copied his subjects and the very costumes he used.

His fame brought him pupils from various parts of Holland, and even from outside. Among the first to enter his studio were Ferdinand Bol, Govert Flinck, Van den Eeckhout, and Jan Victoors. Later on, Nicholaas Maes, Karel Fabritius, Philipe de Koninck, and Samuel van Hoogstraeten were the most famous of his pupils. Each pupil paid him about 100 florins a year. Besides this, the work they did for him in painting and etching added, according to his contemporary, Joachim von Sandrart, a sum of 2000 to 2500 florins. His pupils worked in cubicles divided off by partitions of canvas or paper.

These were the happiest days of Rembrandt's life. Saskia was a devoted wife; he painted all day, surrounded by his pupils; he could feel that he was universally appreciated. Yet he did not slacken or rest on his achievement or make his way easy by creating a formula out of the manner which had become so popular. With fame came wealth; he had his own earnings, and the money from his pupils, and Saskia brought him a fortune of 20,000 florins. His commissions seemed endless and were well paid, for the times. About 1637 he was getting 500 florins for a portrait, and corporation pieces were paid for at the rate of 100 florins for each figure. His output of etchings was considerable, and these were in those days, as they are now, valued according to their states. The famous etching of “Christ with the Sick around Him, receiving Little Children,” done in 1649, usually known as the “100 Florin Plate,” gives an idea of the prices he might receive for an etching.

With all these means he was able to indulge his passion for collecting. His house became a regular museum of precious stuffs, jewels, arms and armour, prints, casts, and pictures. He possessed some examples of the work of Adriaen Brouwer, an artist whom he particularly admired; and had eight landscapes by Hercules Seghers. In 1637 he added to his collection a painting of "Hero and Leander," by Rubens, which he bought for 424 florins. His method of buying at auction was certainly curious and unusual. He would start with such a high bid that no one else would enter into competition. He defended this custom by declaring that he did it to show his respect for art.

In 1639, Constantin Huygens introduced him to the Stadhouder, Prince Frederick Henry, who gave him a commission to paint a series of Passion pictures for which he was to receive 600 florins each.

His reckless generosity and extravagance, his kindness to less fortunate artists, whose demands he never refused, were leading him into money difficulties, as his correspondence with the Stadhouder's secretary, in which he presses for immediate payment for completed pictures, shows. He had already borrowed money on several occasions, and in 1639 he wanted more for the purpose of buying a house.

Since he first came to Amsterdam, he had moved from one dwelling-place to another, from the Bloemgracht to the street of the new *doelen*, thence to the Binnen Amstel. But now he felt the need of a house and studio of his own in which to store his collections and lodge his students. So in 1639 he was negotiating the purchase of a house at No. 4 Joden Breestraat, right in the midst of the Jewish quarter. This house, which

exists much as Rembrandt left it, was purchased for the public in 1906 and made into a Rembrandt Museum.

The house had been built in 1606. The price of it was to be 13,000 florins, which Rembrandt undertook to pay in instalments : 1200 florins on his entry, in May, 1639; 2050 florins within a year, and the remainder in five or six years, interest being added to the unpaid instalments.

This transaction was the first cause leading to his ruin, so far as anything external can be said to have been the cause of it. In any case, it led, through a long series of unfortunate proceedings, to his bankruptcy in 1656. The real cause, of course, lay within himself. He must have been extravagant to the verge of madness, for, besides the money he derived from other sources, his income, as estimated by Bode, amounted to something between £5000 and £6000 a year during the first years of his residence in Amsterdam. He paid only a few instalments—actually, about 6000 florins in all—and, in spite of his considerable income, the money he got from Saskia, and the sum which came to him on his mother's death in 1640, he was never able to pay more. He was, nevertheless, still able to add objects to his collection, for which he paid good prices, on one occasion giving 637 florins for a book of prints by Lucas van Leyden.

An inventory was made in 1656, on his bankruptcy, of the furniture and other contents of his house. There was not much in the way of furniture : various chairs, tables, presses, and beds. The objects in his collection formed the bulk of the inventory : pictures, prints, drawings, casts, jewellery, costumes, porcelain, glass, and musical instruments. The casts

HENDRIKJE STOFFELS

Painted 1651

In the Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh



were mostly from the antique, and one was from Michael Angelo. There were also prints after a great many Italian painters.

One of the first portraits painted in his new house was that of himself, in 1640, and now in the National Gallery. Accomplished as this is, it is not one of his best works. It is admirably drawn and very delicately modelled, but it has a certain restraint, as though the very fact of painting himself imposed certain limitations; which, indeed, it probably did. Its main interest lies in the fact that it gives a real idea of the appearance of the painter. He was then in the days of his prosperity, as the richness of his clothes indicates; but the face, while it is serene, with its shrewd clear eyes, is perturbed by a growing anxiety, and there is more than an indication of self-indulgence about the mouth. The painting is smooth; but it is a smoothness which is not sought for, as in the earlier portraits. The cool tones of the face are relieved by a sudden note of carnation, which is now almost startling, although that may not have been the case when it was first painted.

The picture of "The Woman taken in Adultery," in the National Gallery, although it belongs to a slightly later date (1644), may be taken as an example of his religious painting of this period. It marks a vast development from his earlier work in this direction. The picture is greatly superior to the "Simeon in the Temple," at The Hague Gallery, painted in 1631. He had by this time freed himself from the grandiose conventional treatment of such subjects, which the Italians had made popular in Holland, and which he had acquired to some extent from Lastman. Rembrandt invested them with an intense feeling of humanity, which was an innovation, and not, at first, popular.

Against the vast spaciousness of the great Temple, the gloom of which is full of atmosphere and rich with subtle suggestion, Rembrandt has, in the picture of "The Woman taken in Adultery," posed the group at the top of some steps in the foreground. It is illuminated by a vivid ray of light falling from a window somewhere above. The figures are painted almost minutely, full of detail, and with the quality of the various materials beautifully rendered, yet the effect is broad and vigorous. The personages taking part in this event are no longer the philosophers and heroic types of the popular religious pictures, but human beings with human passions, human character and weaknesses. It is a real living scene, and not a mere illustration of an abstract idea. The posing of the figures is eloquent and indicative of the different lives and mental attitudes of the individuals who play their parts in the drama. The picture was painted for Jan Six, the patron and friend of Rembrandt. In 1657 it was valued at 1500 florins, which was considered a high price for the time.

But Rembrandt was not superior to his fellow-painters only in the truth and variety of character in the individuals he painted and in the expressiveness and invention of his grouping; he was at the same time more artistic and more profound in his general truth to Nature.

It is, however, not difficult to understand how his contemporaries would regard this new attitude towards religious subjects with extreme disfavour as a degradation of religion. Rembrandt was getting beyond them and their limited outlook. His popularity was now on the decline—a decline which had its beginning in the painting of "The Night Watch" of 1642.

It is interesting to contrast the picture of "The Woman taken in Adultery" with "The Adoration of the Shepherds," also in the National Gallery. This latter picture was painted only four years later, in 1646, but it seems to mark a world of development from it.

It is the beginning of Rembrandt's last and greatest phase in which he achieved complete union of the real and the spiritual : a fusion which has been attained so absolutely by no other artist. In this picture he has not treated each figure as a separate individual, with every detail of his costume fully represented, as in the former picture; he has suppressed all truths but those which were most essential. Each figure is as much an individual in character; each is a simple separate person. One can tell from the painting the nature of the life of each person appearing in it, but the relationship each bears to the whole is much more intimate, much more profound; and the painting is much freer and more interesting.

It is true that Rembrandt was influenced greatly by his moods and that he treated every subject in a different way—in its own way, as it were—and that each theme presented problems which required different solutions; but the difference between these two pictures is one of real development. Rembrandt had at last attained to that standard of artistic and spiritual quality which was his great achievement, and which characterized all his work after 1644 or thereabouts.

CHAPTER IV

THE NIGHT WATCH : FAILURE

THE period from 1632 to 1642 was the most successful time of Rembrandt's life. He had seen his pictures in demand everywhere; he had a great following of artists and pupils; he lived happily with Saskia; in short, he had tasted all the fruits of success.

But this period was soon to come to an end, and from the heights he had reached he was to fall to corresponding depths. In almost every respect, save that of his art, he was to experience the most bitter loss and disappointment. And through it all he continued to paint masterpieces, one greater than another. It was a triumph of spirit over matter.

Already, during the latter part of his period of prosperity, he had begun to feel the pressure of money difficulties largely, as we have seen, through his own folly. That period had been marked by his two most important commissions, both of them for corporation pieces; a kind of work in which he was not at his best.

"The Anatomy Lesson" brought him to Amsterdam in 1632, and led to his fame and success; "The Night Watch," an infinitely greater picture, painted in 1642, during the height of his prosperity, marked the beginning of his decline in worldly fortune and reputation.

The contrast between the two pictures is an obvious one, and has often been made. The one was then the most successful example of a work done on accepted lines, the other violated

convention, and by its originality brought him disrepute and the loss of worldly estimation. In the first case, he was the best exponent of an art which was popular; in the second, he had become a prophet, soon to be without honour.

It was an irony of Fate—and yet easily understood, when one considers the invariable attitude of the public towards works of art which do not conform to accustomed styles—that Rembrandt should have reached fame by means of a comparatively commonplace painting like “The Anatomy Lesson” and be led to ruin by an original masterpiece like “The Night Watch.”

Most of the important towns of Holland possessed, at this time, civic guards or bands of militiamen. They were an outcome of the war with Spain, and were very popular with the people. There was considerable competition between the civic guards of different towns.

The headquarters of the guards, the halls in which they met, were called *doelen*. The *doelen* were usually adorned with pictures representing portraits of the company. Each painting would represent a dozen or more figures, and the exigencies of such a composition imposed limitations which were intolerable to an artist of such a free and independent spirit as Rembrandt. In the case of “The Anatomy Lesson,” he had worked more or less successfully within the conditions imposed, but it was a very different matter in the case of “The Night Watch.” If public taste had stood still, Rembrandt himself had gone on; in the ten years his artistic development had been immense. He was no longer a young man of twenty-six, with a reputation to make. He was an established artist, universally recognized as a master, and it was impossible for him to submit to conven-

tional limitations, as Frans Hals had done with such success, as may be seen in the superb series of his pictures at Haarlem.

It was the custom for each person represented in the group to contribute towards the sum paid to the artist. This, in itself, added many difficulties, for it is obvious that if each individual painted were to be satisfied the opportunities of the artist would be considerably circumscribed. In this case there were sixteen contributors to the sum of 1600 florins paid to Rembrandt, and of these only two were thoroughly satisfied.

In Rembrandt's day the picture was called "The Arming of the Guard"; its present and popular title is a misleading one, as it does not represent a night scene. For many years it could not be properly seen, and by the eighteenth century it was so darkened by dirt and many coats of varnish that Sir Joshua Reynolds, when he saw it, had much difficulty in persuading himself it was by Rembrandt. About this time it was first given the title of "The Night Watch," probably because of its darkened condition.

The picture was originally hung in the hall of the shooting company, for which it had been painted. In 1715 it was removed to the Town Hall, which is now the Palace at Amsterdam. On that occasion it was cut down on all four sides to make it fit a position between two doors. Two copies exist of the picture in its original state : the small oil-painting by Gerrit Lundens (born 1622), in the National Gallery, which was painted for Frans Banning Cocq about 1660, and a water-colour, in a private collection at The Hague, done for Banning Cocq's family in 1655. The water-colour gives the exact title : "The young Lord of Purmerland (Banning Cocq) giving an

order to his Lieutenant, the Master of Vlaerdingen, for the company to march out."

About 1889 the picture was cleaned and restored. It is now hung in a room specially built for it in the Rijks Museum at Amsterdam. It is placed so that it stands almost on the floor, and is seen by an admirably arranged side light, which is screened from the eyes of the spectator.

The picture represents the civic guard, under its captain, Banning Cocq, about to march out from the *doelen*. The lighting of the picture is actually meant to be sunlight, which falls on the two figures in front; it is an attempt to reproduce the effect of light one gets in the porch of a church when a group of people emerges into sunshine, but the light and shade are so forced for purposes of dramatic effect that it cannot be said to be true to any natural effect; it has an *atmosphère de tableau*, and not the atmosphere of Nature.

Of its vitality and vigour there can be no two opinions. Hoogstraeten, a pupil of Rembrandt's, wrote an appreciation of it, in which he said that its vigour made other pictures look like painted cards, but he added that he wished the master had put more light in it.

The picture has been discussed and criticized from every point of view. Fromentin, in his remarkable studies on the "Maîtres d'autrefois," did not hesitate to call it a failure. He attacked it as a whole and in detail; he found the handling "*presque maladroite et tâtonnante*."

Many writers have been astonished at the presence in the picture of the charming young girl with the dead bird hanging from the girdle of her dress. The part she plays in the com-

THE BURGOMASTER

Painted c. 1661

In the National Gallery



position seems obvious; she is dressed in yellow, somewhat like the lieutenant, whose figure she balances on the other side of the black figure of the captain. Her presence suggests that this company of militiamen is not at all warlike or terrible; it introduces an intimate note in the picture and gives it almost an air of festivity.

The picture is original, powerful, and dramatic; it is the work of a master, although it is certainly not his *chef d'œuvre*. In it, Rembrandt has pushed his mastery of *chiaroscuro* to an extreme for the sake of dramatic effectiveness.

The shadows are forced almost to blackness and enfold the figures in mystery, with the exception of the captain and the lieutenant, while the young girl is illuminated by a sudden ray of light. The architectural background is lost in gloom.

The painting is unequal; some parts, including the figure of the captain, have come easily, whilst others, and especially the white and gold lieutenant, are literally built up with paint; the painting of the latter figure has the wonderful quality of impasto, so characteristic of Rembrandt's later work.

The colour of the picture is warm dark brown, passing to a lighter golden brown, with diverse notes of local colour, such as the crimson sash across the captain's breast; the blue and red of the banner; the green dress of the drummer, etc. There is an effective contrast between the stationary figures and those in movement.

The artist has been concerned to carry out his conception without regard to any other considerations whatever. He has succeeded in expressing a remarkable dramatic moment full

of vitality and movement. The result was, however, that both the sitters and the critics were displeased, with the exception of Captain Banning Cocq and the Lieutenant, the two prominent figures in the composition. The other sitters complained because they had not been given sufficient prominence; they had not received value for their money. The critics made fun of the black shadows.

The picture was not in the tradition; it was strange and unusual; it was original; and when one compares it with the *doelen* pictures by Frans Hals and Van der Helst, which were the accepted convention for such things, and which were familiar to the public and the critics, one can easily imagine the shock given to them by "The Night Watch" and the indignation it aroused. Such things were not common to Holland in the seventeenth century.

Michael Angelo's statue of "David" was stoned by the people of Florence, and, to come to more recent times, the Pre-Raphaelites, lately exhibited with such approval at the Tate Gallery, and competed for by collectors on the rare occasions when they appear at public auctions, were met with unbridled contempt for many years. The case of Whistler is still fresh in the memory of most people, and the French Impressionists, recently discovered in a state of high-priced rarity in Old Bond Street, were hailed as unparalleled imbeciles less than fifty years ago. Innovation in art, as, on a notable occasion, in religion, is almost a certain means of provoking public frenzy. Appreciation is rarer and less noisy.

Rembrandt's popularity began quickly to wane. Commissions became less and less frequent as his money difficulties increased;

and the master had other domestic troubles. Since 1639, Saskia's health had been far from satisfactory, and now she was seriously ill. She had had two daughters, who died in infancy, which seems to indicate that there was something physically unsound in her constitution. There is an etching of a sick woman in a white head-dress, done in 1642, which is supposed to represent her shortly before her death.

In 1641 her son Titus was born. He was more fortunate than the others, as he lived to the age of twenty-seven. He was some consolation and help in his father's later life.

Saskia was a pleasant, amiable woman, and during the eight years of their married life she had been a good friend and companion to Rembrandt. That she was on good terms with her husband is practically proved by the will which she made on June 5, 1642. She left all her property to Titus; her husband, Rembrandt van Ryn, until his re-marriage, or until his death if he did not marry again, to enjoy the use of her property, on condition of bringing up Titus honourably according to his condition and fortune. On Rembrandt's death or re-marriage, half the property was to go to his heirs and half to Saskia's sister Hiskia. And Rembrandt was to administer the estate without any interference on the part of the Board of Orphans. No inventory was made of her property—an omission which was the cause of some trouble in after years.

Saskia died soon after this, and was buried in the old church of Amsterdam on June 19, 1642. Her death was the first of many blows to fall on Rembrandt at the time when he was least able to bear them. She had frequently sat to him. Indeed, an inspection of his etchings, drawings, and

pictures would make us familiar with her appearance throughout the years of their life together.

The paintings of her are much more important than the etchings, but they cannot be strictly relied on as portraits. For example, her hair, which was very characteristic, varies in them from light red to dark brown, and even the colour of her eyes changes; it is sometimes brown and sometimes blue.

The loss of his wife was a sad blow to Rembrandt. He endeavoured to console himself in his sorrow by plunging even deeper into work. During the period that followed he painted a great many religious pictures.

We have already noticed two of the most important, "The Woman taken in Adultery," of 1644, and "The Adoration of the Shepherds," painted two years later. The fine picture of "The Sacrifice of Manoah," at Dresden, belongs to a slightly earlier period, having been painted in 1641. It is a variation of, and an improvement on, the drawing which was a study for it. Other examples are the "Reconciliation of David and Absalom," at Petrograd; which *was* in the Peterhoff—and *may* be now—the fine monochrome painting of "Christ taken down from the Cross," in the National Gallery, both painted in 1642; the later "Susannah," at Berlin, of 1647, with its imaginative Oriental landscape background. The titles of these could be easily multiplied, but a list of them would serve no purpose here.

Overwhelmed with sorrow and troubled by other domestic matters, Rembrandt now sought refuge from the cares that assailed him on all sides by leaving the city. His life had

become like a walled garden of sorrow, in which he cultivated his choicest blooms, but from which he could find no escape. His friend, Jan Six, coming to his rescue, offered him the hospitality of his country house near Hillegom, and thither Rembrandt retired at the close of 1642.

Jan Six was a distinguished personality of the time, typical of the best class of cultivated amateurs. He belonged to an old Cambrai family, and had been born in 1618. He was a man of lively intelligence, deeply interested in art and literature. The splendid collection of pictures which he formed may still be seen, after some ceremony, at a private house in Amsterdam. He wrote poetry, and in 1648 he published a drama on the subject of "Medea," for which, as a frontispiece, Rembrandt etched the plate known as "The Marriage of Jason and Creusa," a rather diffuse design.

During the course of his life, Six held several important public posts in Amsterdam, and eventually became burgomaster in 1691. Rembrandt's celebrated etching of him, standing reading by an open window in his room, was done in 1647. Professor A. M. Hind describes it as "perhaps the most perfect achievement of tone by unaided etching which has ever been accomplished."

In the peace of the country, where he remained for two or three years, Rembrandt was able to forget his troubles in the interest of studying landscape. The sum total of his work includes very few paintings of landscapes—fewer, even, than those done in etching. He had painted landscape backgrounds to classical compositions, such as the "Rape of Proserpine," in Berlin, and the "Rape of Europa," both done about 1632, and

“Christ appearing to Mary Magdalen,” of 1638, in the Buckingham Palace collection. But of pure landscapes there are very few. The most important are the small Czartoryski wooded landscape under a cloudy sky, from which gleams of light fall on a river and trees; the “Landscape with a Ruin on a Hill” (at Cassel), a semi-classical, eclectic composition painted about 1646, which shows Rembrandt’s lack of ease when painting landscape. This, however, is not the case in his most famous landscape, “The Mill,” which belonged to Lord Lansdowne, and was exhibited at the Rembrandt Exhibition at Burlington House in 1899. This impressive picture, so simple and poetic, was painted about 1654, and was his latest painting of a landscape. It was sold in 1911 for the immense sum of £100,000.

Previous to 1640 he had not etched a single landscape, but now his sojourn at Jan Six’s house gave him every opportunity.

It has often been claimed that Rembrandt’s work in landscape has not been adequately appreciated. It is very clear that it was not his proper *métier*; nor did he ever study it profoundly enough to express himself completely in it. The forced contrast of light and shade so effective in his portraits was intolerably artificial out of doors. His production in this direction was limited, one feels, from choice. He produced a fair number of etchings and drawings, the latter being especially admirable; in fact, in this medium his landscapes have never been surpassed for their wonderful depth of suggestion, obtained by a notable economy of means.

His landscapes in oil are mostly rather late, when his remarkable power of selection and simplification was pretty well developed. Faced with the new and extraordinarily difficult

problems which landscape-painting presented, he could solve them only by applying the knowledge he had gained in the studio. Instead of surrendering to landscape and learning what he could from the study of atmosphere and natural colour, he applied to it the exaggerated *chiaroscuro* which he used in his portraits and figure paintings.

He approached landscape with a very decided *parti-pris*. This, of course, was not obvious or effective in his etched or drawn landscapes, where colour was not part of his medium of expression. With line and with tone he could realize a whole gamut of atmospheric expression, and in as completely artistic a manner as he achieved any portrait or interior study. And he got in his etched landscapes effects as dramatic and as intense as anything he produced in the other branches of art of which he was so consummate a master. But to apply to living landscape, with its infinite variety and gradation of subtle and vital colour, the heavy shadows and violent contrast of light and shade which he had mastered in the studio, was to express, at once, obvious falsity and lack of conviction.

If his landscapes in oil are to be regarded at all as high expressions of art they must be considered strictly as paintings, and not as landscapes; that is to say, not from the point of view of Nature. And, after all, Nature was his criterion. He constantly stated that one should follow only Nature, and obey no rules but hers.

Landscape out of doors, *en plein-air*, is expressed, above all things, by light and air, and these things can be expressed profoundly and convincingly in paint only by colour-values; that is, by some attempt to achieve actual truth.

PORTRAIT OF AN OLD LADY

Painted c. 1634

In the National Gallery



Rembrandt used only tone-values, and these in a forced way, which had no reference to a given natural effect; consequently, his painted landscapes, although they were infinitely suggestive and most interesting as paintings, were, and could be, only superficial—when they were not violently unreal—in regard to natural truth.

Van Goyen (1596–1656), another Leyden artist, and the best of the earlier Dutch landscape painters, came much nearer to the truth; but, then, his attitude towards out-of-doors Nature was much simpler and sincerer than Rembrandt's. He gave himself up humbly to the study of Nature in order to learn her secrets, whereas Rembrandt used her merely as subject-matter for the exercise of entirely pre-conceived methods and ideas. He had painted too long and too much in the studio, and had used too much a personal method, admirably adapted to studio work, to be able to approach Nature with a frank and open mind. His landscapes were infinitely more dramatic and, in their way, perhaps more intensely felt than Van Goyen's humble and simple *motifs*, but in a real essential truth they were in a different and much lower category.

One critic has written of the "broad expanse of luminous liquid air" in discussing the Cassel landscape—a particularly inappropriate example for such praise—but there is neither air nor luminosity without natural colour, and that "luminous liquid air" existed entirely in the imagination of the critic.

In his drawings the matter is quite different; in a limited medium of which colour was not a part, he obtained an unrivalled power of concentrated expression.

Rembrandt in landscape work has had a very limited influence

on other painters. The chief and most undoubted of his followers was Philip de Koninck (1619-88); the other followers were mainly third- and fourth-rate painters. The reason is fairly obvious; the artificiality of effect, which was a blemish in Rembrandt's landscapes, and which was tolerable when used by Rembrandt, was easily imitated by men of inferior talent, in whose work it was detestable. They adopted his mannerisms and made them into a new school; thus making a virtue of his weaknesses. Moreover, the gradual trend of landscape was towards truth of natural effect until it culminated, after so many years, in French Impressionism.

"The Mill" was a fine dramatic *painting*, and a great design, wonderfully simple and executed with consummate skill, but it is not to be regarded as a painting of Nature.

It was circumstance rather than inclination that turned Rembrandt's attention to landscape. Being comfortably situated in Jan Six's house, it was natural that he should study his surroundings. He was always at work, and we have already observed his gift for finding subjects in the life immediately around him. The famous etching of "The Three Trees," with its dramatic effect of the rainstorm clearing off to the left, was done at this time, in 1643. There is a fine sky effect in this etching, which is Rembrandt's most serious study of clouds; the flat country stretching away into the distance in the left half of the plate is suggested with much subtlety. The beautiful "Omval" is two years later. The powerful and summary etching in outline known as "Six's Bridge" belongs to the same year. There is a curious tale about this etching which may or may not be true. It is said that it was done against time as a

wager, while the servant went to fetch mustard from a village near by.

During the next few years he painted several portraits and a few religious pictures. The portraits included that of his friend Dr. Ephraim Bonus (1642) and those of Nicholas Berchem, the painter, and his wife, painted in 1647. Among the religious pictures, of which the spiritual expression has been intensified by his sorrows, were the "Susannah and the Elders," in Berlin (1647), with its background of an Oriental garden scene, to which reference has already been made, and two versions of the "Supper at Emmaus," in 1648, which subject he had previously painted in 1629.

Then came the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, and amid the general rejoicing arose a demand for pictures to commemorate it. But nobody thought of Rembrandt, who was now thoroughly unpopular. Everything went to his pupil Govert Flinck (1615-60) and to Van der Helst (1613-70), a showy and superficial painter, who had made a hit with his large pictures of civic guards.

At this time Rembrandt produced the large romantic monochrome sketch of "The Concord of the State," which is in the Rotterdam Museum. It was crowded with figures and gave promise of a remarkable picture; but it did not find a purchaser, and remained in the artist's studio.

In the country, Rembrandt had regained a certain peace of mind in the hospitable house of his friend Jan Six, but his domestic troubles were by no means at an end. At the time of his mother's death, Titus was only a few months old, and it was necessary to find someone to look after him. A widow

named Geertgen Dircks was engaged as his nurse. She appears to have been a rather coarse person; not unkind, but of uncertain temper, and a strange mixture of greed and generosity. Naturally, her position in the household was an important one, and she obtained a certain dominion of Rembrandt and caused him a great deal of trouble.

She appears to have been fond of her young charge, and in 1648 she made a will leaving most of her property to Titus. Her violent temper led to frequent scenes with Rembrandt, and on one occasion she threatened to revoke her will. But some sort of agreement was arrived at in 1649, by which Rembrandt undertook to pay her a sum of 150 florins, and 160 florins a year afterwards, while Geertgen was to make no further claim on him. But the peace was not permanent, for soon afterwards she brought an action against Rembrandt for breach of promise of marriage. She alleged that they had been on the terms of husband and wife. In the end the court ordered Rembrandt to pay her 200 florins a year for life. Shortly after, her mind became permanently deranged, and she was removed to an asylum at Gouda at Rembrandt's expense.

It was during the course of these troubles that we first hear of Hendrickje Stoffels, a charming country girl of twenty-three, who had been a witness in one of these disputes. She was in his service at the time, and was soon to become his friend and companion, and the chief consolation of his most difficult years.

We seem to know her intimately through Rembrandt's paintings of this period. She appears in many of his most beautiful pictures. She was a charming young person, of a fresh, warm-hearted personality, with real human sympathy. It was perhaps

natural that her presence under his roof should lead to intimate relations. She became his mistress, and, as a result, was called before the Consistory of the Reformed Church of Amsterdam in 1654 and forbidden the Communion.

There was an obstacle to their marriage in the clause of Saskia's will by which Rembrandt would lose his interest in her estate if he married again, and by this time his financial situation had become desperately involved.

Hendrickje is the "Young Girl at a Window," in the Dulwich Gallery, a beautiful picture, but somewhat heavy in tone. She appears again in the charming picture, at Petrograd, of "The Holy Family," painted in 1645. The picture has a flight of baby angels, quite foreign to his work, which were evidently adapted from Domenichino's "Communion of St. Jerome." There is a delightful intimate and homely charm about the picture, which is essentially human. One can understand, from it, the peace and happiness which Rembrandt, who was a home-loving man, must have found in her presence by his fireside.

Contemplation of this picture with the pretty youthful figure of the mother, which was painted in 1645, and of other recognized paintings of the beautiful Hendrickje make it almost impossible that the painting in Edinburgh, reproduced here, can really represent Hendrickje as it is commonly supposed to do. It is dated 1651, when she was about twenty-four or twenty-five years old. The picture represents a coarse, heavy woman, nearer forty-five than twenty-five, and without any charm. It would be more appropriate as a portrait of the nurse Geertgen Dircks, who, however, in 1651 was in an asylum. In 1883 it was exhibited at the Royal Academy Winter

Exhibition, by its then owner, Sir H. St. John Mildmay, as "A Female Portrait," a more suitable title. But there are other instances of Rembrandt's habit of making his portraits look older than his sitters. In the famous and masterly painting of Jan Six he has made him look like a man of sixty, when he was in reality only thirty-six. And in some of his own self-portraits he does not look his right age.

Hendrickje was the model for the famous painting of "Bathsheba," in the Louvre, painted in 1654, the gem of his paintings of the nude, in which, though somewhat robust, she is still beautiful and sympathetic. She figures in the "Woman with Pearls," of 1652, and the wonderful National Gallery picture of a "Woman Bathing," painted in 1654. She is the subject of the golden "Portrait of a Girl," in the Louvre, one of the most delightful portraits of her, and at a later date she appears with her daughter Cornelia in the "Venus and Love," also in the Louvre.

CHAPTER V

THE LAST PHASE : BANKRUPTCY AND DEATH

IF the death of Saskia seemed to close one period of Rembrandt's life, the appearance of Hendrickje marked the beginning of another : his last and most remarkable phase.

He had come to Amsterdam, the hub of his universe, a young man full of enthusiasm, gifted beyond the usual, a passionate human nature, longing for freedom, hungry for experience. There, fame and success had welcomed him with open arms; he reached the heights of popularity. There he worked perhaps too much; there he lived perhaps with too little restraint. He knew a few happy years with Saskia. In some of his earlier self-portraits there is, perhaps, more than a hint of complacency. His artistic development through crowded years of labour had brought him to a pitch of original artistic effort consummated in "The Night Watch." But he had grown beyond his public; his originality, newly attained, had meant the loss of his popularity; his work no longer flattered his admirers; he had dared to offer them work which they could not understand. He paid the inevitable penalty, as other artists have paid it before and since his day.

Then came the death of Saskia, and with it a new experience of sorrow and loneliness. He was thrown back on to himself; he communed more deeply with his own nature.

The withdrawal of that worldly success, of which he had drunk deeply—never an unmixed blessing for an artist—led him to find a profounder consolation in his art. Henceforth

spiritual expression found in it closer fusion with the material, with the result that in the last phase of his life he produced a succession of the finest works of art in painting that the world has ever seen. But during these years he was not, at first, without human consolation. His years with the devoted and warm-hearted Hendrickje, and the sensitive and responsive Titus, were the happiest in his life. In the sun of their affection his nature matured and ripened like a rare fruit.

Despite the opinion of the world, Rembrandt now settled down to a congenial life, practically a married life with Hendrickje. In her he found that sympathy and understanding which smoothed, if they did not altogether obliterate, the harshness of the world's usage; and in which he could, by feeling contentedly himself, produce his best work unhampered by any mental or spiritual uneasiness.

By 1661 the couple were openly regarded as a man and wife; a legal document of that year, unearthed by Dr. Bredius, relating to some trifling matter, refers to Hendrickje as "Madame Hendrickje Stoffels, wife of Sr. Rembrandt van Ryn, artist painter." There is, however, no record that they were ever actually married.

In 1654, Hendrickje gave birth to a daughter, whom Rembrandt acknowledged and christened Cornelia, a name which had been given to the two daughters of Saskia who died in infancy. Hendrickje was a peasant, entirely without education—it is said that she could not even write—but she had other qualities which more than made up for any lack of culture. She was devoted to Titus, to whom she behaved as a second mother.

Somewhere about this time, or a little earlier, Rembrandt painted the peculiarly interesting picture known as "The Painter's Study," which is in the Glasgow Art Gallery. In this the nude figure of Hendrickje is posed on a platform, while a man, said to be Rembrandt—although he does not particularly resemble him—is painting from her at an easel.

During the sixteen-fifties also, he painted the attractive "Man in Armour" (at Glasgow), which is one of the most popular of his pictures. The delicacy and refinement of the features suggest that the model for this may have been Titus. It was once in the collection of Sir Joshua Reynolds. Admirable as the painting is, and beautifully as the armour is rendered, the picture does not belong in feeling to this period. He had long outgrown his fondness for dressing up his sitters, and was now content with simple humanity—with man unadorned.

The portrait which is one of the earliest to mark the development of his final manner is the "Portrait of a Man," at The Hague, painted in 1650, and now said to represent his elder brother, Adriaen Harmensz van Ryn, born in 1597 or 1598, who became a miller after his father. He died some time between August, 1652, and April, 1653. This strong and rugged portrait is extremely simple. The modelling is expressed subtly and strongly, with vigorous touches of paint put on with a full brush.

This portrait makes an interesting contrast with "A Man with a Cap," the picture in the National Gallery, reproduced on page 5. In this picture, painted about the same time, the light is concentrated on the left of the head, throwing the rest of the face into exaggerated shadow. The gain in dramatic effect is

counter-balanced by the suggestion of forced unreality. The paint is more fluid and thinner than in the portrait of the brother. The exaggerated dark in the beard on the light side of the face is disquietening, and suggests a growth of unnatural blackness. These speculations come between one and the real significance of the picture. One is conscious of a device for obtaining an effect which is a little too obvious.

Rembrandt had been fortunate in having excellent models in his own family. They all had to spend considerable time posing to him, and Titus had to play his part. Titus himself made some attempts to paint. The inventory drawn up in 1656 rather pleasingly mentions a "Head of Mary," "A Book," and "Three little Dogs done from Nature," the work of Titus.

Titus appears as a charming figure; delicate and refined; an admirable type of model for Rembrandt's religious compositions. As the young Joseph, as the youthful Christ, and as Tobias he was admirable. He was Joseph in "Joseph and Potiphar's Wife," at Petrograd, painted in 1655; he is in the Louvre "Good Samaritan," 1648, and in many other compositions, not to mention several exquisite portraits, such as the young and wistful portrait in Lord Spencer's collection, the delightful boy in Lord Crawford's picture, the Wallace Collection picture, and as the young man in Sir George Holford's collection.

Titus was a very loyal and affectionate character. Later on, as we shall see, he was a great consolation to his father.

Rembrandt's financial troubles had, in the meantime, gone from bad to worse. Lack of money did not, however, prevent him from adding to his collections, or from dressing Hendrickje

in expensive furs or decorating her with pearls and diamonds and enamelled bracelets. To make his purchases and to meet other demands which became increasingly pressing he began to borrow money from the usurers by whom, in the Jewish quarter, where his house was situated, he was surrounded.

The house in the Breestraat, which stands as a monument to his greatness and his weakness, had been the initial cause of his money troubles, but the money he borrowed so freely did not go to pay off the arrears of purchase money or the interest on it.

In 1653 the former owner began to press for payment of the money owing to him, now amounting to some 9000 florins. Rembrandt replied by demanding the title-deeds, but the owner obtained an order that Rembrandt must pay or leave the house. Among the many people from whom he borrowed money was his friend Jan Six, who advanced him the sum of 1000 florins, a transaction which later on led to the disruption of their friendship. Other creditors included Cornelis Witsen, a burgo-master of the town, and a certain Van Hertsbeek. These creditors also demanded payment, while Jan Six transferred his debt to Gerbrand Ornia, an act not entirely friendly to Rembrandt.

Saskia's family now intervened, ostensibly on behalf of Titus, but indirectly in the interests of the whole household, their object being to rescue as much of the property as possible as belonging to Saskia's estate.

Seeing the trend of events, they had previously demanded from Rembrandt, in 1647, a statement of his position. It was estimated that, in 1642, the property of himself and Saskia

amounted to 40,750 florins; half of this would legally come to Titus, for whom a legal representative was now appointed. The ownership of the house in the Breestraat was made over to Titus.

All this, however, could not delay the evil day, and in 1656 Rembrandt was declared bankrupt. Two years later the house was sold by the liquidator for a sum of 11,218 florins, which was 1700 florins less than he gave for it. Some of the creditors were paid out of the proceeds, but one of them, Van Hertsbeek, was sued by Titus's representative and compelled to disgorge. In the final settlement, which was not effected until 1665, Titus received 6952 florins as his share.

His collections also were sold about this time, and with less satisfactory results. They consisted of pictures, many from his own hand, engravings and etchings, drawings, and various objects of art. All the precious things that he prized, and for which he had paid so dearly, fetched something less than 5000 florins. But the greatest loss was his own paintings, drawings, and his etchings in their most prized "states." These could not be replaced even by the devoted efforts of Titus and Hendrickje.

Incessant as his labours had been, Rembrandt tried to redouble them as a way of meeting his embarrassments. In spite of his troubles and anxieties, he produced in the year 1656 some of his finest etched portraits. The superb Arnold Tholinx, a mature and vital piece of characterization, was the chief of his portraits of that year. Impressions of the first state of this plate are so rare that one of them fetched more than £1500 in 1883. Two other plates were portraits of officials with whom he was

brought into contact through his bankruptcy : Jacob Haaring, warden of the Debtors' Prison, and Thomas Haaring, auctioneer of debtors' effects. These two portraits, through their associations, are silent witnesses of Rembrandt's troubles; but it is characteristic of him that, harassed as he was, he should have turned circumstances to account and etched two of his finest portraits from the men who were charged with the unravelling of his tangled affairs.

The portrait of Jacob Haaring, with its atmosphere of melancholy, has an expression of puzzled amazement, as though the sitter found Rembrandt a very curious person.

The portrait of Jan Lutma, the goldsmith and sculptor, with its solidly modelled head, was etched in this year, as was also the portrait of Rembrandt's friend, Abraham Francen, the art dealer, represented in an interior surrounded by works of art.

But these were not the only results of his labours during this year of bankruptcy; his paintings included some notable pictures, such as the "Lesson in Anatomy by Doctor Deyman," which was partly burnt in 1723. A fragment of it is preserved at Amsterdam. There were also religious compositions; the serene and wistful "Jacob blessing the Children of Joseph," at Cassel; "The Denial of St. Peter," with its subtle study of artificial light, at Petrograd; and "The Adoration of the Magi," at Buckingham Palace.

It is interesting to compare these pictures with the monochrome painting of "Christ before Pilate," in the National Gallery. This was done about 1635 or 1636. It is an extraordinary expression of human emotion; but it has nothing of the dignity and serenity of these late religious paintings; as a

representation of tiresome old men quarrelling it is very remarkable, but as a painting of its subject it is unsatisfactory. It shows the danger of Rembrandt's very human and realistic treatment of such themes; a danger which was even more marked in his treatment of classical subjects when he made, on occasion, the clumsy nude figure of a rather coarse Dutch woman serve as "Diana Bathing." It was always the real human thing that he painted, whatever title he might give the picture. In any case, the work he turned out was a splendid record for a year of such tribulation.

For the next few years, until 1663, he was without any settled habitation. He wandered from one lodging-place to another. With no definite studio, utilizing any room that was available; without the Persian carpets and flowers in brass pots, so necessary to successful portrait painters; with eyesight beginning to fail, he painted some of his best works.

The curious but extraordinary picture of "David playing the Harp before Saul" (at The Hague Gallery) was painted about this time. Rather unsatisfactory in composition—the two figures scarcely seem connected—and almost grotesque in some details, it is a haunting expression of sadness. The National Gallery possesses a superb collection of Rembrandt's paintings of the latest period, from "The Woman Bathing," of 1654, to the "Portrait of a Woman," of 1666, which looks as though it had been painted at least ten years earlier. These pictures can be seen and studied at leisure by most of the readers of this book. In them Rembrandt's art can be seen at its finest.

Now he has reached that state of perfection in which vision or inspiration and the means of expressing it are completely

united. It is as though his intuition expressed itself outwardly and visibly, without the intervention of any material means. And these later portraits are all different; each problem presented is solved in its own way. And the refined, sensitive technique—how it responds to his perception in so many varied ways ! Compare “A Jewish Rabbi” (No. 190, at the National Gallery), painted about 1657, with its wonderful fluent touch, which reflects the slightest nuance of colour and the subtlest variation of modelling, with the strong and vital “Portrait of an Old Man” (No. 243, in the same gallery), painted in 1659.

And what a glory of colour there is in all his late work ! His sense of colour is entirely personal ; it seems to be the colour of his spiritual expression rather than the colour of Nature. He had throughout the development of his painting suppressed local colour in order to obtain his masterly concentration. He had used it decoratively as an adjunct, but now in the maturity of his art, it had become, as it were, the colour of the soul of his portraits. It floods with a glowing golden brown the “Portrait of a Burgomaster” (No. 1674, in the National Gallery), and bathes in rich and varied darkness the “Portrait of an Old Man.”

Rembrandt had now attained perfect simplicity, but it had been reached only by constant work and incessant research. A member of the Institut de France, being asked what genius was, replied : “*C'est de ne jamais connaître la difficulté.*” But all his life Rembrandt had known it, faced it, and overcome it. The path of his development had been long and stony. He was, like all considerable artists, practically self-taught. It is very doubtful whether he would have reached the same heights

THE SYNDICS OF
THE CLOTH MERCHANTS' GUILD

Painted 1661-2

In the Rijks Museum, Amsterdam



of pure expression if he had spent many years under a master at the most impressionable time of his life.

The importance of an artist must depend, in the end, on his own personal message and the completeness of his expression of it. His training, his life, is devoted to learning the most appropriate way to deliver it. Obviously, self-training, in which the painter is groping incessantly within himself to find a personal manner of expression, is ultimately the soundest and produces the most permanent results. The fact that Rembrandt's masterpieces were all produced in his maturity is not unusual. It is surely fitting that the perfect fruit should be the result of the various processes of natural growth. In Rembrandt's case there was no final decay. He died when his art had reached its full perfection.

While he was growing he had painted, with increasing power, the outward life of man; in his last phase, he painted the very soul. He had acquired such power that the act of painting had become almost instinctive or sub-conscious.

Among the wonderful late portraits at the National Gallery, the "Portrait of an Old Man" and "A Burgomaster," referred to already, serve to express two sides of Rembrandt's mind. One might call them the concrete and the abstract for convenience, although this would not be quite just. In the "Old Man" the head stands out of the enveloping darkness, illuminated by a sudden light. It is intensely real; admirably modelled and most beautifully painted. It is built up with paint; every variation in modelling is expressed by a definite stroke of the brush. In spite of unreality of the effect of light and shade, it is instinct. One feels one knows the man

intimately; it is his character and soul that are painted on the canvas in the shape of this living head. "A Burgomaster" seems more like a dream; a vision embodied or scarcely embodied, and yet it is no less real than the "Old Man"; only the reality is kept farther back. It is more like an expression, a creation, of mature dignity and sadness and old wisdom than the painting of a man. And yet the man is there complete in his personality. The subdued harmony of old gold in this picture is like the colour of his personality. It is a revelation of the essential soul that lies at the heart of things. It was painted about 1661, or two years later than the "Old Man."

Rembrandt's late work has that quality which I have noticed about all good pictures : the quality of enticing you into itself, of inviting you to explore its mystery, to live with it, to know and love it. Bad pictures, on the other hand, are aggressive and brazen-faced; they shout their virtues at you like politicians during an election.

"The Portrait of an Old Lady" (No. 1675, at the National Gallery), also painted about 1661, comes somewhere between. It is the last word in the painting of old age.

"The Painter's own Portrait" (No. 221, at the National Gallery) is painted like the "Old Man," but such a revelation of a man's soul has never been seen before or since. To look at it seems almost sacrilegious; that faded countenance, those tired penetrating eyes with their melancholy wisdom, make up, it seems, the sum of human suffering, sorrow, and experience.

There are no more fine clothes; no more rich furs and silken materials; no more jewels, only an old turban cap and the workaday garments of the old master. He had long since

ceased to care for such things—for appearance and for superficial decoration. He had worked out to bare essentials. Baldinucci has recorded that when he was painting he had acquired the habit of wiping his brushes on the back of his clothes. Such was the old painter in 1659, the approximate date of the portrait.

When these pictures were painted he had no settled home; no definite abode; no certain studio. In 1661 he ceased to etch; his eyesight was failing, and etching was difficult to manage without a regular place for his apparatus. His last plate is "The Woman with the Arrow," the most atmospheric of all his etchings, and the most satisfactory of his etched nudes, although in it his grasp of form is failing a little. But he was fortunate in having a good model in the faithful Hendrickje, who was always with him and shared his fortunes.

The interesting suggestion that Rembrandt visited England in 1661-2 and stayed for some time in Hull is, apparently, without foundation. It is more likely that he had found his new home on the Rozengracht or Quay of Roses as early as the winter of 1661. The years 1661 and 1662 saw the production of a large number of pictures, including two important groups, the "Syndics" and "Claudius Civilis," and it is probable that he was in some settled abode when he undertook them. The smaller pictures included the paintings of Titus as the angel in the St. Matthew picture, and Hendrickje and the young Cornelia in "Venus and Love," both in the Louvre.

A certain amount of peace and happiness returned to Rembrandt. In December of 1660, Hendrickje and Titus entered into partnership for the purpose of dealing in pictures, prints,

copper-plates, and wood-cuts, with impressions therefrom, objects of *vertu* and all things relating thereto. Rembrandt was to assist them both with his advice. In return they advanced him 1750 florins, to be repaid by Rembrandt as soon as he was in a position to do so. This kindly arrangement was designed, of course, to assist the old master, and the deed was so drawn up that no responsibility could fall on him in the event of failure.

It is difficult to realize that Rembrandt should have been in money difficulties at this time, for he was painting pictures which would now fetch many thousands of pounds.

For the Town Hall, now the Palace, at Amsterdam he painted his largest and most remarkable (though not his finest) picture, the "Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis," which was finished in 1662. The commission for this had originally been given to Govert Flinck, but Flinck died in February, 1660, and someone remembered his master's existence. It may have been Dr. Tulp, the hero of the early "Anatomy Lesson," who held an important position in the City Council at that time. The picture was painted to fill a lunette in the gallery at the Town Hall, but it did not win favour with the authorities, who did not scruple to criticize the work of the unpopular master. After being in position for a short time, it was taken down and returned to Rembrandt's studio. He may not even have been paid for it. Some time later the canvas was cut down. The central portion, which measures about seven feet by ten, alone survives.

It is now in the National Museum at Stockholm. It represents the chieftain Claudius Civilis (who flourished in the years 69 and 70), swearing-in his Batavians to resist their common foe,

the Romans. The figures are grouped around a table on which lights are burning, the lights being hidden by the nearer figures. It was one of those effects of which Rembrandt was a master. It is said to be very splendid and subtle in colour. There are about eleven figures in the surviving fragment, and each one is a remarkable portrait—a masterpiece which the civic authorities despised and rejected.

This brings us to the “Syndics of the Cloth-Merchants’ Guild,” which bears two signatures and two dates, 1661 and 1662. This picture is, in some ways, Rembrandt’s greatest work. It would be interesting to know what sum he was paid for it, but, unfortunately, there is no information on that point.

Nor do we know who was responsible for giving Rembrandt the commission for the picture, this ray of sunlight in the dark days of his old age; who gave him this opportunity to present to humanity this great masterpiece, which marked and glorified the last ten years of his life, and signaled in so striking a way the zenith of his development. It so easily might not have happened. It is a picture for all time, of universal interest. There is really no time in art; no truly great picture can ever be old-fashioned.

And of what was it composed? Of six very prosaic men in ugly costumes, seated around a table covered with red cloth against a background of warm wooden panelling—at a business meeting. No painter after it can complain that his surroundings are too hideous to inspire a work of art. It is not easy; but, then, art never is easy. It is the artist who creates the beauty. Art springs from artistic feeling; unless you have the root, you cannot get the flower. To the facts of life the artist is indifferent;

it is the effect that concerns him; and effect is a matter of colour, of light and shade, of masses and relations. Nothing is so ugly that it will not look beautiful under certain effects. Whistler has expressed this truth inimitably in the well-known passage when he describes how the factories and factory chimneys become palaces and campanili in the night.

This picture has the perfect simplicity of all Rembrandt's late work. In it he has painted simple humanity, and humanity is eternally interesting. How effective are these masses of black against the warm grey background. Almost the only note of colour is in the red tablecloth, which is not only a strong dynamic point in the composition, but gives value to the blacks. This is the last and greatest of his three famous portrait groups. In the early "Anatomy Lesson" he was still groping; each figure was painted separately, he had not then achieved that subtle relationship between them by which he could weld them into one consistent whole. In "The Night Watch" he obtained a wonderful dramatic effect; but it was an effect imposed somewhat artificially, and not arising within the subject. He obtained it by ignoring the limitations imposed on him, and the conditions expected of the painter of such pictures. But in the "Syndics" there is no straining after effect. He is great enough now to paint within the limitations imposed. Yet there is no record that the picture gave particular satisfaction or that it was recognized as a supreme masterpiece.

Rembrandt had lost reputation through his painting of "The Night Watch," and the attitude of society and the public was then what it has always been to the artist. It gave recognition and appreciation to his renown, and not to his art.

While he painted on familiar and accepted lines, he was successful and became the fashion; the moment he expressed an originality that was beyond it, the public dropped him. He offered it food for thought, and *that* is notoriously indigestible.

The picture of "The Syndics" now hangs in the Rijks Museum at Amsterdam.

About the year 1654, Rembrandt painted the portrait of his friend Jan Six. This painting was different in many ways from his other portraits. It is painted with a freedom of touch, an ease and lightness of handling, which one associates more with Frans Hals than with Rembrandt. But it is much more solid and more artistic than any work of Hals. In Hals the light touch was habitual; sometimes monotonous; it had nothing of the newness that marked its use in the Six portrait. In Rembrandt it expressed the freedom of spirit and perhaps a certain joyousness that the painter felt in the presence of his old friend.

It must have been shortly after this that the two quarrelled. In 1653 we know that the painter borrowed 1000 florins from him, a debt which Six transferred to a third party, possibly after the portrait had been painted. In any case, their friendship ceased. Six married, about this time, the daughter of the surgeon Nicholaes Tulp, of the "Anatomy Lesson" fame. This alliance might, one would imagine, have strengthened the friendship with Rembrandt; but in 1656 the bride's portrait was painted, and the commission was given, not to Rembrandt, but to his pupil, Govert Flinck. This slight to an old friend was unmistakable evidence that their relationship was at an end.

One reason for Rembrandt's continued money difficulties

even in his humbler and less expensive way of life, and with the amiable arrangement made by Hendrickje and Titus to assist him, was the fact that his existing creditors had a lien on all he might make by his art. In spite of all this, the old painter might have lived happily and in moderate comfort in his modest house on the Quay of Roses, but Hendrickje fell ill and died in 1663. This was an irreparable blow to the old painter, and left a blank which nothing could fill. His sense of loneliness increased when Titus married in 1668. He had a daughter, born in the following year, named Titia, and six months later Titus himself, who had always been delicate and frequently ailing, lay on his death-bed. His life had been simple and unassuming in his affection for Hendrickje and his devotion to his father.

Thus was Rembrandt bereft of the last personal ties which bound him to life. Having lost the two beings whose love had been his support and consolation in the last bitter years, nothing remained to him. There were now, as his companions, only Titus's widow (Magdalena van Loo), the baby Titia, and the little Cornelia, who was fifteen years old; and two of these could be but little consolation to the old man.

Some time during these last years he had one pupil whose companionship must have been a source of interest and comfort. This was the young painter Aart de Gelder (born in 1645), who came to him from the studio of Samuel van Hoogstraeten, a former pupil. There is something touching in the thought of the presence of this solitary pupil in the studio of the wise old master who had once had so many.

In spite of the deepening sorrow of his life, Rembrandt still

painted, and with no perceptible diminution of power; he did not lay aside his brush until his death. The pictures of his last years have a glory of colour which is unmatched in any of his earlier work. It is as though he put into his art the colour which had gone out of his life.

The noble and truly pathetic picture of "The Return of the Prodigal," at Petrograd, was painted in the last year of his life. For absolute beauty of feeling and sheer expression of soul, the two figures of the prodigal son and the old father have never been surpassed. The originality of the pose of the prodigal, who kneels with his back to the spectator and his head resting against his father's body, is very remarkable. In the work of any other painter it would be called daring—an absurd epithet to apply to Rembrandt. The exquisite compassion of the old father, who bends forward in forgiveness, his hands on the shoulders of his kneeling son, is one of the sublimest things in the history of art.

It seems to sum up and fittingly to close Rembrandt's own spiritual life. The picture, as a whole, is a curious composition; the essence of the picture is the group of the father and son, and the design would be vastly improved if the rest of it were removed. The other standing figures are aloof and remote, with a strange air of detachment. Perhaps they are meant as a contrast; possibly they represent the attitude of the world, regarding with cold indifference, a beautiful act.

Another late picture of a very different kind is the large painting of a family group, at Brunswick. This is an exceedingly happy picture. It represents a father and mother with their three children. It is a robust and vigorous painting,

glowing with positive colour, which shows that the master's hand had lost none of its cunning.

The end of Rembrandt's life was drawing near. Those whom he loved were dead. He had completed a succession of masterpieces which only the greatest masters have rivalled. Through a lifetime of ceaseless endeavour, of sorrow and suffering, and unremitting purpose, he had reached the summit of artistic expression, in which the soul poured forth its strength and its sweetness in pictures of imperishable beauty.

Early in this last year of his life he had attended, as the child's guardian, the baptism of Titia. It was almost his last act, for seven months later, on October 4, he died. No one among his contemporaries appears to have mentioned his death. He died forgotten, in the deepest poverty, possessing only his clothes and his painting materials. In some ways, despite the pathos of it, this seems a fitting end. He achieved immortal fame by his art, and when life ceased he possessed nothing but the instruments by which he had expounded that art.

Rembrandt van Ryn was buried in the Westerkerk of Amsterdam, on October 8, 1669.

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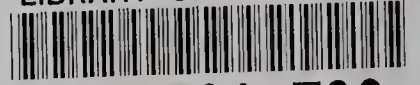
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